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TAGS: OPRC KPAO KMDR JO

SUBJECT: JORDAN: MEDIA REACTION TO SITUATION IN GAZA

¶1. SUMMARY: Since the weekend, Jordanian media outlets have focused all but exclusively on events in Gaza involving Israeli air strikes on militant positions. Coverage has been accompanied by gruesome photos taken of casualties in Gaza. Events dominate editorial commentary as well as front and inside-page coverage. U.S. statements have been accurately and prominently reported. END SUMMARY.

¶2. Beginning December 28, Jordanian news outlets and other media have published extensive and sensational coverage of events in Gaza involving Israeli air strikes on militant positions, almost to the exclusion of all other news.

¶3. On December 28, the day after the first day of widespread air strikes, all major newspapers carried graphic photos on the front pages depicting multiple bodies lying on streets in Gaza. Reuters' photo of the bodies of Hamas policemen at a Gaza police station was the choice of three of the four biggest Amman-based Arabic dailies. Al-Ghad's front page was also printed solely in black and white to express sorrow. All dailies carried banner headlines with the terms "Israeli Massacre" and "Butchery" as the most prominent. News content centered on international and public reaction, including public demonstrations reportedly in the "thousands" in all major cities. Demonstrators' conduct was described as peaceful, with isolated acts of burning the Israeli flag. Demonstrations were reportedly led by members of Jordan's labor unions and Islamist community. Major themes of the demonstrations included accusations that Palestinian President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad were "conspiring against the Palestinian people," and that Egyptian President Mubarak was "an Israeli agent." Other photos showed some demonstrators waving Hamas flags. Reports also indicated that more demonstrations and activities are expected in the coming days to be held across the Kingdom. Reports accurately quoted initial U.S. statements on the situation in Gaza.

¶4. On December 29 and 30, all major newspapers continued to publish extensive accounts of developments in Gaza covering front and the majority of inside pages. Photos and headlines tended to focus on King Abdullah's actions, including his donation of blood as part of a nationwide campaign in support of civilian casualties in Gaza, and his decision to dispatch field hospitals for the same purpose. There was also significant ink on the now daily public demonstrations in Amman, Zarqa, Mafraq, Kerak, Ajloun, Tafileh, and Madaba. Demonstrators' conduct continued to be peaceful and well-organized, though flag-burning continued, including that of the American flag. Themes of demonstrations were similar to those of December 28. Reports gave prominent mention to King Abdullah's telephone conversation with President Bush and to December 29 statements by the White House spokesman in Crawford.

¶5. Print outlets and Jordan state television limited their sourcing on events in Gaza to Jordan's official news agency or international wire service accounts.

¶6. Editorial Commentary

-- "When Words Are Disabled and Silence Cries"

Queen Rania issued a special commentary which appeared on the front

pages of the December 30 editions of both government-aligned Arabic dailies, Al-Rai and Ad-Dustour, and on the inside pages of the two independent dailies, Al-Ghad and Al-Arab Al-Yawm. She wrote, "There is nothing to say... and words cannot help us here.... This has been my feeling in the past few days." The Queen urged Jordanians to raise their voices and make charitable contributions, commenting, "We have to prove to Gaza and its people that we are their brothers and that we are with them. And that our heart's pain is exceeding our actions.... Limiting our reaction to sorrow is shameful, because tragedy in Gaza does not need sympathy, a person runs to help his/her brother when he is under injustice."

-- "Abnormal Arabic Response to the Massacre"

Chief editor Taher Odwan in the December 28 edition of the independent, opposition Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm comments that any official Arab response "will be worthless as long as it does not include recalling immediately all Arab ambassadors from Israel, and expelling its ambassadors from Amman and Cairo." He adds that because Arab governments have not shown Israel and the international community "the red eye," Arab citizens "will not forgive them and will not keep silent toward the occupation's crimes that kill everything in ourselves including humanity and feeling of dignity and that Palestinians have the right to live and determine their destiny like others."

-- "Expel Israel's Ambassador Immediately"

Islamist watcher and conservative commentator Mohammed Abu Rumman in the December 28 edition of the independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad criticizes Egypt's reaction, calling it "a historic shameful position." He also criticizes the Palestinian Authority. Abu

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Rumman commends the Jordanian government response as "advanced at the Arab level" both in its official and public dimensions. He elaborates, "The strict position required from the Jordanian government is to expel the Israeli ambassador, close down the [Israeli] embassy in Amman, recall Jordan's ambassador from Israel, suspend ties with Israel under the current political circumstances... denounce the Israeli aggressions as war crimes against civilians and innocents... and demand the international community to hold Israel accountable for these actions based on the international legal rules." Abu Rumman concludes, "Relations with Israel have become a political burden with high security cost on Jordan, and it is impossible to imagine any sort of political ties with Israel amid this bloody show in Gaza's streets."

-- "The Surviving Political Sect"

Member of Parliament Bassam Haddadin in the December 30 edition of Al-Ghad criticizes the leaders of Jordan's Islamist community "for losing their political balance," saying "the leaders of the Islamist movement behave as if they are leaders of Hamas." He expressed his hope that the behavior of Jordan's Islamists is temporary and due to their outrage at the situation in Gaza, "as it is not in anybody's interest to go back to the language of isolation that accuses others of being traitors."

BEECROFT